

"Kingsley Plantation"

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Reading/Language Arts

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Have you ever heard of Kingsley Plantation? This is my report on Kingsley Plantation on Ft. George Island in Jacksonville, Florida. I will talk about the first owners of the plantation that built it and the ones after that. I will talk about Zephaniah Kingsley and his family during the time he owned the plantation. I will also talk about the buildings and the life of the slaves while on the plantation. Maybe you'll learn something in this report about these topics.

The first owner of Kingsley Plantation was John McQueen, a bankrupt American Revolution veteran from South Carolina. He immigrated to Florida with his 300 slaves and was rewarded with Ft. George Island in 1793. By 1798, McQueen had built the house now known as Kingsley Plantation. McQueen's cash crop was Sea Island cotton which was imported from the Bahamas. He also had a sawmill and fruit trees. The same year that high waters destroyed his sawmill, his cotton crops were meager. He was now bankrupt again and he sold the plantation to John McIntosh from Georgia. McIntosh revived the cotton crops and became one of the wealthiest planters in the Spanish province. McIntosh was a part of the Patriots Rebellion. This was an attempt by Americans in eastern Florida to take the province from the Spanish and give it to the U.S. The Spanish quelled this rebellion and the U.S. withdrew its forces. McIntosh and others fled back to Georgia.

A man named Zephaniah Kingsley was living in Florida at the time and had managed to stay on better terms with the Spanish. In 1814, Kingsley leased the plantation from McIntosh. In 1817, he bought it from him. Kingsley, his wife Anna Kingsley, and their three children lived on the plantation until 1837. Kingsley bought Anna Majigeen Jai as a slave in 1806. She was just thirteen years of age. Once she arrived in Florida, she was pregnant with Zephaniah's child, and then became known as Anna. Zephaniah never married her in a ceremony recognized by American or Spanish law. He still recognized her as his wife and their kids as his legitimate heirs. Anna and her children got their freedom in 1811. Anna was then given her own plantation and she owned her own slaves. She became a successful business woman.

After their plantations were destroyed during an uprising against the Spaniards (the Patriots Rebellion), the Kingsleys acquired Ft. George Island in 1814 and managed it for 23 years. When Florida was given to the U.S., Anna moved to Haiti because of harsh new race laws. For the 37 years that Anna and Zephaniah were together, they never shared living quarters. They did this to honor her African heritage, because tribal Senegal women and men did not share living quarters. While on the plantation the Kingsley's grew Sea Island cotton, which was the cash crop, corn, sweet potatoes, and other food crops. In 1839 Kingsley sold the plantation to his nephew.

There were many buildings on the plantation. Kingsley had a two story house with a separate kitchen house. The house faced the waterway, and was placed so the breeze would blow through it. There was a barn that served as a stable and stored feed for livestock. Buildings that no longer exist include a carpenter's shop and a mill. The ruins of 23 slave cabins made of tabby are still visible on the plantation today. There were originally 32 cabins. They built these cabins by pouring tabby or coquina into wooden frames and adding wooden roofs, shutters, and doors. Most of these houses had fireplaces for cooking and heating. There were about 60-75 men, women, and children in these houses. Wells supplied water for these people.

Slaves had to do anything the owner ordered them to do. On Kingsley Plantation the slaves' work was assigned according to the task system. If slaves finished their assigned task, they could do other work like sewing, gardening, hunting, or fishing. Often a task was so difficult that it could last all day.

Slaves couldn't prevent family members from being sold to other plantations. Every day a family might worry that a son or daughter could soon be sold. Slaves had NO freedoms whatsoever. They couldn't travel as they pleased or decide what job they would do. Usually slaves were not given the opportunity to read or write. Instead stories, songs, and family memories were told to the children orally. African traditions reflected the slave community's religious activities.

Zephaniah Kingsley owned over 32,000 acres of land in Florida, making him one of the biggest land owners. It was unfortunate that Kingsley had to move his family to Haiti because of racial laws. When he did move, he left behind four plantations with over 30,000 acres of land. Slavery was very harsh, but it's positive that some plantation owners allowed the slaves to keep their African traditions and rituals. If we had more records or writings written by the slaves about slave life, we could better understand the events that took place in plantations everywhere.

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